

*From liner notes for the CD 'Life of the Worlds – Journeys in Jewish Sacred Music' by Chazan Richard Kaplan, which contains Richard's recording of **El Mistater** (2003):*

['El Mistater' is] a major hasidic composition, brought to North America by Rabbi Zalman Schachter Shalomi in 1939, barely saving it (and thank G-d, himself) from the Holocaust. This poem on the Ten Sefirot (Divine Emanations) was written in Tsefat around 1550 by Rabbi Avraham Maimin, a student of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (1522-1570), the teacher and master to the great Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria (1534-1572), known as ha'ARI ("The Lion"), Rabbi Maimin's name appears acrostically at the beginning of stanzas.

This musical version comes from the Husyatiner *hasidim* (devout ones), Poland. Each of the eleven sections of the song (the last section is a paean to the Ten Sefirot) has its own melody, reflecting the feeling of its corresponding *Sefirah* (Emanation), Reb Zalman told me that it was composed by a Husyatiner cantor who presented it to the Husyatiner *Rebbe*. ... This prayer is most often found as part of the Sabbath Third Meal celebration, which in hasidic circles is seen as a most favorable time for mystical profundities to be experienced. Other communities chant it every day.

Len's work on this piece

Because the poem was written by a disciple of Moshe Cordovero, I looked to the latter's book *Tomer Devorah* (The Palm Tree of Deborah) for inspiration. This work describes the qualities of each of the Sefirot to show how we can emulate it to develop our own character. I wrote a commentary on 'El Mistater' by taking quotes from this work.

Then, because the musical version comes from the Husyatiner hasidim, I put together some notes about these Rebbes and their lineage (descended from the Ruzhin dynasty). I treat the second Husyatiner Rebbe, Yisroel Friedman (1858-1949), a grandson of the Ruzhiner)—as the inspiration for this music, and include his picture on my *Etz Chaim* diagram.

As always, when I want to make a Hebrew text something of my own, I create a singable English version. The more I sing this music, the more I feel the energy of each sefirah that its particular melody invokes. Singing it in both Hebrew and in English deepens my meditation on the sefirah's essence. I have made recordings in both languages of all eleven melodies (ten + a final verse which unites the ten sefirot into one).

EL MISTATER

Translation by Len Fellman (lenfellman@comcast.net)
to be sung to the Husyatiner melody
as taught by Zalman Schachter Shalomi through Richard Kaplan

The God who is hidden—to all of our reason is naught.
Wisdom concealed, wisdom kept secret,
from all of our deepest thought.
Cause of all causes, surpassing all causes, hidden crown of all.
A **keter** we give you, a crown we now offer, to you Adonai.

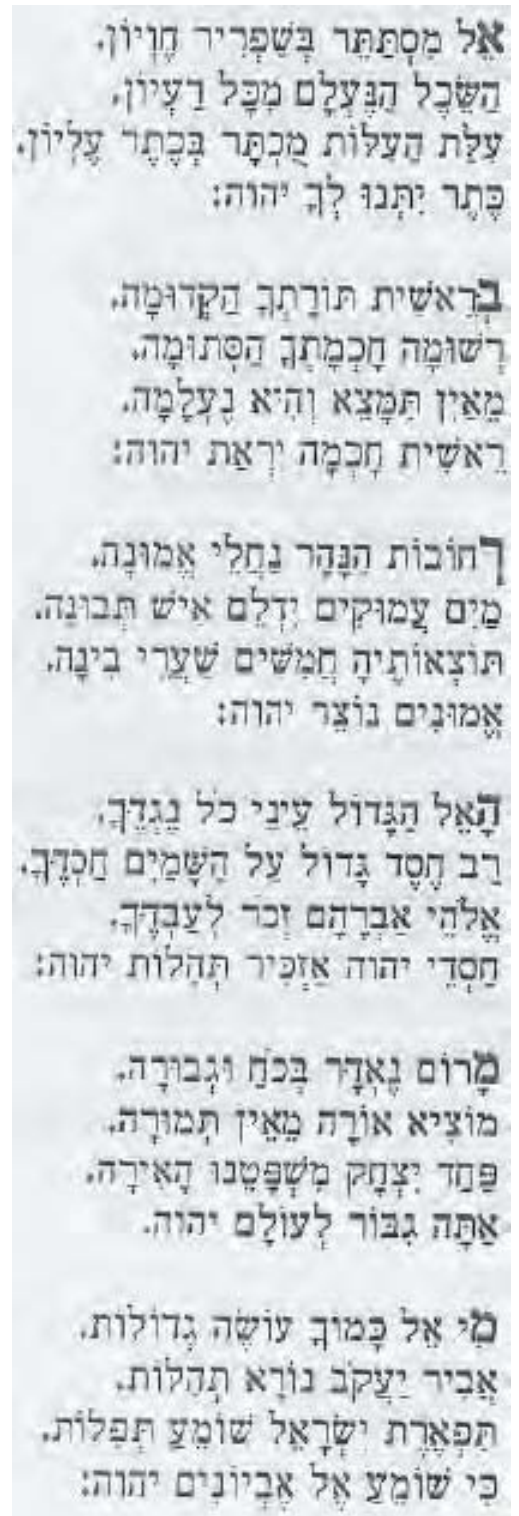
At the first was your Torah, the Torah before time.
Imprinting your wisdom, it was sublime.
It came forth from nothing, and then it was hid. (2x)
The beginning of wisdom, *resheet **chochmah***, is *yir'at Adonai*.

The rivers are flowing, emunah streaming,
Waters run deep for one with understanding.
The gates are all open, gates yielding **binah**
fifty in number, all bringing binah.
When we're faithful, we know you are there,
guarding us always, Adonai.

O great Lord of all, all your creatures search for you.
From your great love,
grace from the heavens pours down on us.
God of Abraham, remember us now.
Remember us your servants: we're all here to serve you.
Chesed of Adonai, hear now our praises, Adonai.

Highest one, adorned with power: **gevurah**,
Drawing down light from where opposites merge.
"Fear of Isaac", bring our judgment to light.
O source of strength, you give us strength, unceasing strength,
Adonai.

What God is like you: doing great things for us all.
Vigor of Jacob, showing kindness, yet you fill us with awe.
Tiferet Yisrael: you never cease to hear our prayers.
The living grace of Israel is hearing all our prayers:
No one but you hears the prayers of the poor, Yah. (2x)
You are the one who listens to prayers, Adonai.



Yah, through our parents' merits watch us now and guide us.
Netsach Yisrael, from our troubles do redeem us.
 From the pit of *galut*, please raise us and uplift us.
 And from the pit of exile, do raise us and uplift us.
 So our labors, the battles we fight, the efforts we make
 may be for the sake of Adonai.

From right and from left is the prophets' insight,
 netsach and **hod** is the source of their light.
 Yachin and Boaz: these two pillars shine bright.
 And all your children (3x) do learn from Adonai.

Within seven veils is the tzaddik hidden.
 He is the *brit*: the world's true foundation.
 The fount of blessing is the tzaddik: **yesod olam**.
 The tzaddik are you (3x) Adonai.

Now: raise up **malchut**, malchut of David, malchut of David,
 David and Solomon.
 Restore now the crown, as did our mother, mother Shekinah.
 This our mother, *keneset Yisrael*,
 She is a mother, *keneset Yisrael*
 this your kalah, this she is called, your own bride.
 Crown of beauty and of splendor all are in your hands, Adonai.

Strong One! Unite us! Make us as one now!
 Through these sephirot, through the ten sephirot.
 If even one is cut off, the light will fail us.
 Count all, take us all, make us one: together we will be a light.
 Our song, please receive it. Our song, do accept it.
 Our song will bring us closer;
 our song will bring us closer to your Spirit.
 May our song now bring us to you,
 because you are our beloved,
 Adonai.

לֵה זְכוֹת אֲבוֹת יִגְן עָלֵינוּ.
 נִצַּח יִשְׂרָאֵל מַצְרוּתֵינוּ גָאֲלֵנוּ.
 וּמִבּוֹר גְּלוּת דִּלְגוּ וְהַעֲלֵנוּ.
 לְנִצָּחַת עַל מְלָאכַת בֵּית יְהוָה:
 מִיְמִין וּמִשְׁמָאל יְנִיקַת הַנְּבִיאִים.
 נִצַּח וְהוֹד מֵהֶם נִמְצָאִים.
 יָכִין וּבּוֹעַז בְּשֵׁם נִקְרָאִים.
 וְכָל בְּנֵיךָ לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה:
 יִסּוֹד צְדִיק בְּשִׁבְעָה נִעְלָם.
 אוֹת בְּרִית הִיא לְעוֹלָם.
 מֵעֵין הַבְּרָכָה צְדִיק יִסּוֹד עוֹלָם.
 צְדִיק אַתָּה יְהוָה:
 בָּא הָקָם מַלְכוּת דָּוִד וּשְׁלֹמֹה.
 בַּעֲטָרָה שְׁעָפָרָה לוֹ אָמֵן.
 כְּנִסַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּלָה קְרוּאָה בְּנִעֻמָּה
 עֲטָרַת תְּפָאֶרֶת בְּיַד יְהוָה:
 חֻק מִיָּחָד כְּאֶחָד עֶשֶׂר סְפִירוֹת.
 וּמִיָּחָד אֶלּוּף יִרְאֶה מְאֻרוֹת.
 סְפִיר גִּזְרָתָם יָחַד מְאִירוֹת.
 תִּקְרַב רַחֲמֵנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה:

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Strong One! Unite us! Make us as one now!
Through these sephirot, through the ten sephirot.
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May our song now bring us to you,
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our song will bring us closer to your Spirit.
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because you are our beloved, Adonai.

אל מסתתר בשפיר תויון. **A**lmighty, well hidden, beyond reason's edge
השכל הנעלם מכל רעיון. soft realms beyond where conscious thought can be met
עלת העלות מכתר בכתר עליון. Most High, Primal Cause crowned with Keter's bright li
כתר יתנו לך יהוה: A crown, we and angels, give You Yah!

בראשית תורתך הקדומה. **B**efore You gave Torah to us Jews at first
רשומה חכמתך הסתומה. Imprinted She was in Your Chochmah arcane.
מאין תמצא והיא נעלמה. From naught She did come and then She was hid
ראשית חכמה יראת יהוה: Chochmah's first fruit is awe of You Yah!

רחובות הנהר נחלי אמונה. **R**ivers of faith flowing broadly at once.
מים עמוקים ידלם איש תבונה. Deep waters, yield freely to the insightful One.
תוצאותיה חמשים שערי בינה. Binah's gates, fifty do open to him--
אמונים נוצר יהוה: Such insightful faith comes from You Yah!

האל הגדול עיני כל נגדה. **H**eaven's grace pour on those who seek You
רב חסד גדול על השמים חסדה. Whose eyes are forever looking for You
אלהי אברהם זכר לעבדה. Abraham's God, please be mindful of us
חסדי יהוה אזכיר תהלות יהוה: Who praise You for Hesed, Oh benign Yah!

מרום נאדר בכח וגבורה. **M**ighty and strong with Gevurah's firm power
מוציא אורה מאין תמורה. extracting light from nought's place of exchange
פחד יצחק משפטנו האירה. Isaac's fright to our judgement bring light.
אתה גבור לעולם יהוה: You are the hero, eternal Yah!

מי אל כמוך עושה גדולות. **M**ysteriously great is Your Mercy's own work.
אביר יעקב נורא תהלות. Jacob's strength mixing kindness with awe.
תפארת ישראל שומע תפלות. Tiferet of Israel You hear our prayer.
כי שומע אל אביונים יהוה: Who else hears the poor except You, Yah!

יְהִי זְכוּת אָבוֹת יִגְן עָלֵינוּ. **Y**ah, may parent's merit protect us from harm.
 נִצַּח יִשְׂרָאֵל מִצָּרוֹתֵינוּ גָּאֲלֵנוּ. Netzah of Israel redeem us from woe.
 וּמִבּוֹר גְּלוֹת דִּלְנוּ וְהַעֲלֵנוּ. Raise us from the pit of the exile's abyss
 לְנִצַּח עַל מְלָאכַת בֵּית יְהוָה: That we too may work for Your plan Yah!

מִיָּמִין וּמִשְׁמָאל יִנִּיקַת הַנְּבִיאִים. **M**eeting of right and of left in the words
 נִצַּח וְהוֹד מֵהֶם נִמְצְאִים. of prophets receiving from Netzah and Hod
 יָכִין וּבֹעַז בְּשֵׁם נִקְרָאִים. Yachin and Boaz these pillars are named
 וְכָל בְּנֵיךָ לְמוֹדֵי יְהוָה: As all of your children learn You, Yah!

יְסוֹד צְדִיק בְּשִׁבְעָה נִעָלָם. **Y**esod is the Tzaddik, one hidden in seven
 אוֹת בְּרִית הוּא לְעוֹלָם. The sign of the pact with the world is She.
 מַעֲיֵן הַבְּרָכָה צְדִיק יְסוֹד עוֹלָם. The fount of blessing is at the world's base.
 צְדִיק אַתָּה יְהוָה: You are the tzaddik, the Manroot Yah!

נָא הָקֵם מַלְכוּת דָּוִד וְיִשְׁלָמָה. **N**ow raise Malkhut up to David and his son
 בְּעֶטְרָה שְׁעֶטְרָה לוֹ אָמוּ. Crown him as Mother Shechinah did and as She will.
 כְּנִסַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּלָה קְרוֹאָה בְּנִעִימָה Israel is named bride and pleasant is She.
 עֶטְרַת תְּפָאֶרֶת בְּיַד יְהוָה: The crown and the splendor are in Your hand, Yah!

חֲזָק מִיָּחַד כְּאַחַד עֶשֶׂר סְפִירוֹת. **H**azak You contain the ten S'firot in One.
 וּמִיָּחַד אֵלּוּף יִרְאֶה מְאֻרוֹת. If one be cut off no light will be seen.
 סְפִיר גְּזֻרָתָם יַחַד מְאִירוֹת. When together they are, then bright in their light
 תִּקְרַב רְנָתִנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ יְהוָה: Accept me and my song too, My Lord Yah!

EL MISTATER

(Semi-)translation and commentary

by Len Fellman (lenfellman@comcast.net)

to be sung to the Husyatiner melody as taught by Richard Kaplan

Why do we begin with the most distant sephira, Keter (Crown)? Keter is beyond all attempts to grasp it with the mind. It appears to be something like a canopy. We can only receive from it. Here is a quote from Tomer Devorah (The Palm Tree of Deborah) by Moses Cordovero, whose disciple (Avraham Maimin) was the author of El Mistater:

“The quality of humility includes all qualities, for it belongs to Keter, which is the highest attribute. It is ashamed to gaze at its Source, but the Cause of its emanation looks continually into it to give goodness to it.”

So we begin our exploration of the tree of life with an act of pure receptivity.

El Mistater—The God who is hidden—to all of our reason is naught.
Hasekhel hane’lam, wisdom kept secret, from all of our deepest thought.
Ilat ha’ilot, surpassing all causes, hidden crown of all.
Keter *yitnu*, a crown we now offer, to you Adonai.

The second sephirah—Chochmah—is wisdom, but it is a wisdom which offers itself to us only in flashes. Most of the time it hides from us. So once again we can receive from it only with awe and humility. Chochmah itself receives from Keter, but turns arounds and bestows its gifts on those below it. Tomer Devorah refers to it as “the father of all created things”.

Bereshit Toratkha, at the first was your Torah, a Torah before time.
Imprinting your wisdom, it was sublime.
Me’ayin timatsey vehi he’lamah.

From nothing it came forth, and then it was hid.
The beginning of wisdom, *resheet chochmah*, is *yir’at Adonai*.

Unlike Chochmah, Binah (or Understanding) is available continually, but only to those possessing “emunah”—faith. The devotee swims in the waters of Binah, as in a river. Binah is on the left or dark side of the Tree of Life, so its function is to absorb the dark forces and bring them to the light. According to Tomer Devorah:

“The function of Binah is to sweeten all judgments and to neutralize their bitterness. The root of every Supernal bitterness is sweet. The Left Side draws its sustenance from above. All its branches are destined to become sweet and they will be perfect once again. Man roots himself in the secret of evil and renders it sweet and brings it into the good.”

Rehovot ha nahar, the rivers are flowing,
 nakhalei emunah (streams of enunah)
Mayim amukim, waters run deep, for one with understanding.
The gates are all open, *sha'arey vinah*,
 fifty in number, these gates bringing **binah**.
Deep insight, *enumim*, discernment and judgment all come from Adonai.

The fourth sephirah, Chesed or lovingkindness, is perhaps the easiest to receive from but at the same time the most difficult to emulate. To act in accordance with Chesed one must (in the words of Tomer Devorah), “concentrate on the good side of a quality and conceal its judgment.”. Our prayers go to the sephirah of Tipheret, which in turns receives from both Chesed and Gevurah. So Tomer Devorah states: “One should intend, with the deeds he performs, to bind Tipheret constantly to Chesed and to bring it forth from Binah in the direction of Chesed.”

Ha El ha Gadol, all your creatures search for you.
Rav chesed gadol, grace from the heavens pours down on us.
Elohei Avraham, zakhor, zakhor.
Remember us your servants: we're all here to serve you.
Chesed of Adonai, hear now our praises, Adonai.

Gevurah is associated with power as well as with the evil inclination. It appears on the left or dark side of the Tree of Life, directly below Binah. According to El Mistater, it draws its energy from eyn temurah: the “place of exchange”. As such it is close to the place where good and evil turn into their opposites. The devotee's task is to “bestir his evil inclination in the direction of the sweet Gevurot”, as it says in Tomer Devorah. One channels one's vital energies in the direction of Binah by striving to do the divine will, whereby the dark forces are sweetened. This sephirah is called Pachad Yitzchak (“the Fear of Isaac”) because Isaac—having been nearly offered up on the divine altar but became instead one of the fathers of the chosen people—understood the transformative potential of Gevurah.

Highest one, adorned with power: **gevurah**,
Drawing down light from where opposites merge.
Pachad Yitzchak, bring our judgment to light.
Atah gibor, you give us strength, unceasing strength, Adonai.

Tipheret is beauty, but it a kind of beauty that is not easy to acquire because it requires a balance between Gevurah and Chesed. As such it is associated with justice. When the dark forces of judgment become so heavy that they become destructive, Tipheret attempts to push the energy to the right, towards the sepherah of Chesed. Thus according to Tomer Devorah:

“There are angels in a certain celestial palace whose function it is to receive the kindness done by man, and when the divine quality of Tipheret pleads against Israel these angels immediately bring that kindness to the notice of the Holy One, Blessed is He, Who has mercy upon Israel, for He delighteth in mercy.”

Tipheret is invoked by studying Torah. It is also God in its most personal form.

Mi El kamokha: doing great things for us all.

Vigor of Jacov, showing kindness filled with awe.

Tiferet Yisrael: shomeah tehilot.

The living grace of Israel is hearing all our prayers:

Ki shomea'a El evyonim.

No one but you hears the prayers of the poor, Yah.

You are the one who listens to prayers, Adonai.

Netsach is victory attained through perseverance, overcoming all obstacles. It enlists the aid of every available ally in the struggle, and in particular the “zechut avot”: merit of the ancestors”. Its success is assured to those who dedicate their lives to the service of God.

Yah, zekhut avot, through our parents' merits watch us now and guide us.

Netsach Yisrael, from our troubles do redeem us.

U mibor galut, please raise us and uplift us.

And from the pit of exile, do raise us and uplift us.

*Lenatseakh, so all of our work, the battles we fight, the efforts we make
may be for the sake of Adonai.*

Hod is called "Splendor", and is a place of learning, communication and prophesy. In Christian kabbalah it is associated with Mercury, the divine messenger. The secret to accessing it is let everyone and everything be your teacher. The Tomer Devorah states:

"As a result of becoming a pupil of all, one has the merit of becoming a chariot to Netsach and Hod: those taught of the Lord."

From right and from left is the prophets' insight,
netsach and **hod** is the source of their light.
Yachin and Boaz: these two pillars shine bright.
Ve chol banayikh, and all your children,
and all your children do learn from Adonai.

The sephirah of Yesod refers to the hidden tzaddik or holy person, and to the correct channeling of energies into the earthly realm, especially in the spheres of speech and of sexuality. El Mistater teaches that the true tzaddik is hidden inside of the seven lower sephirot. Since the goal of creation is in the sephirah of malchut, the Tomer Devorah says:

"The Bow of the Upper World is outstretched only for the purpose of shooting arrows into the sephirah of Malchut."

Within seven veils is the tzaddik hidden.
He is the *brit*: the world's true foundation.
The fount of *berakhah* is the tzaddik: **yesod olam**.
Tzaddik atah (3x) Adonai.

The culmination of the divine act of creation is the sephirah of Malchut. The most difficult task is to unite Malchut with Tipheret. According to Tomer Devorah:

"The Shekinah is love-sick for the Union of Tipheret with Malchut."

"One should bind Her (Malchut) between Netsach and Hod. It is necessary to visit Her soul and to entreat Her to take food and drink from the Supernal Flow from which she abstains because Her soul is sick for the misery of Israel, just as it is with the sick of the material world. And Tipheret is sick, for He moves from His place in the world to come to wander after Her in this world."

It further states:

"Do all of your actions for the sake of Heaven and without any trace of evil inclination. Tephillin and Tzitzith are also powerful in shielding Her (Malchut) that the Outside Ones have no dominion over Her and he should be accustomed to wear them. Thirdly, to make union with Tipheret during the time of reading the Shema and by setting aside periods for the study of the Torah. And when he sets aside a period for any purpose he should intend that this is the time of the Shekinah, the King's Daughter."

Now: raise up **malchut**, *malchut David, malchut David,*
David u Shlomo.

Restore now the crown, as did our mother, mother Shekinah.

Imo, imo, keneset Yisrael,

She is a mother, *keneset Yisrael*

this your *kalah*, this she is called, your own bride.

Crown of beauty and of splendor all are in your hands, Adonai.

The ultimate goal of spiritual practice is to integrate the ten sephirot in oneself. This not only leads to self-realization, but also serves to bring the entire community together, because each member of a congregation becomes a focal point for one of the sepherot, which explains the principle of the minyan. As Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi interprets El Mistater: "If one (of the ten sepherot) be cut off, no light will be seen."

Khazak! Unite us! Make us as one now!

Eser sephirot, through these ten sephirot.

If even one is cut off, the light will fail us.

Sapir, take us all, make us one: *yachad* we will be a light.

Tikrav rinatenu. Our song, please receive it.

Tikrav rinatenu;

our song will bring us closer to your Spirit.

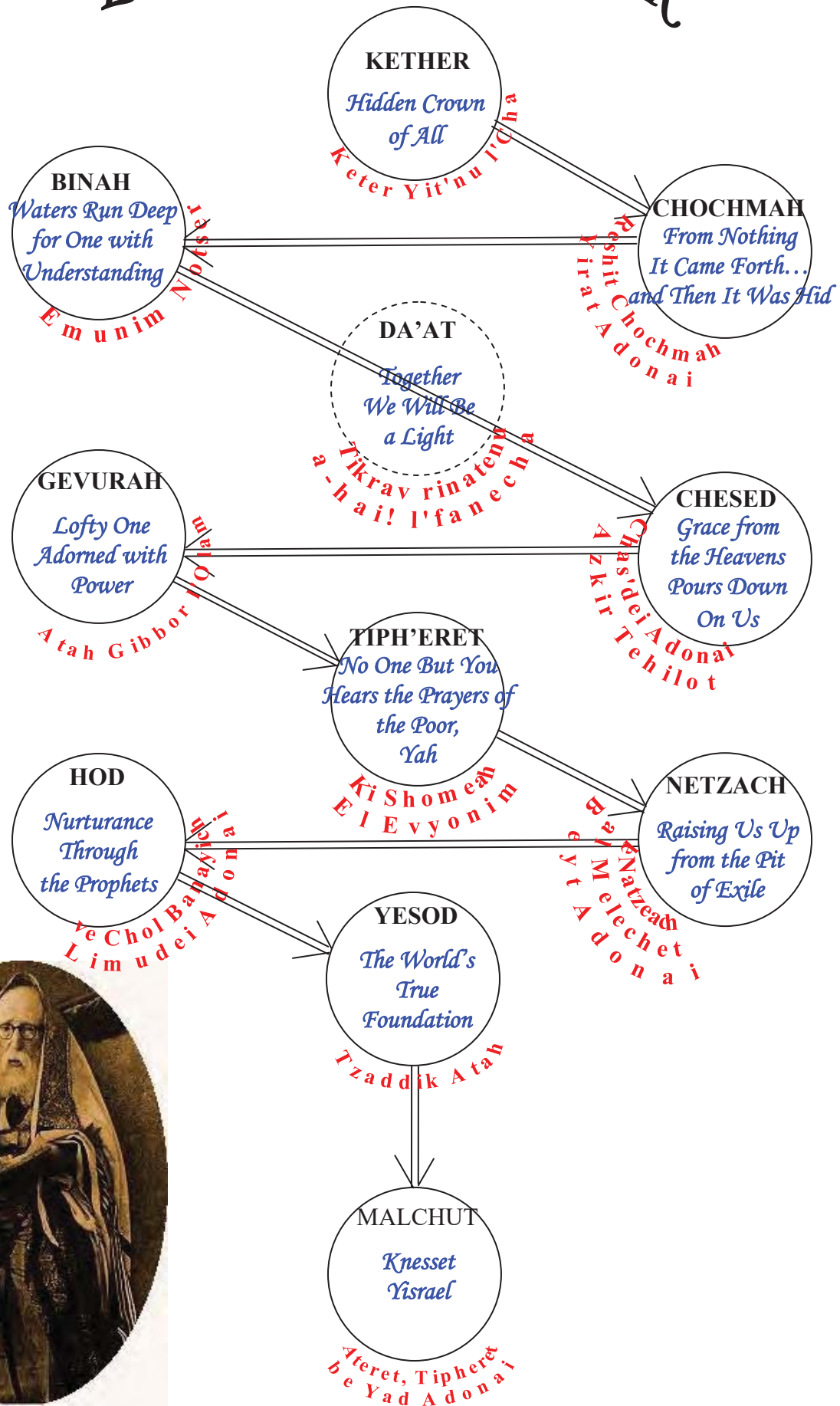
May our song now bring us to you,

because you are our beloved, Adonai.

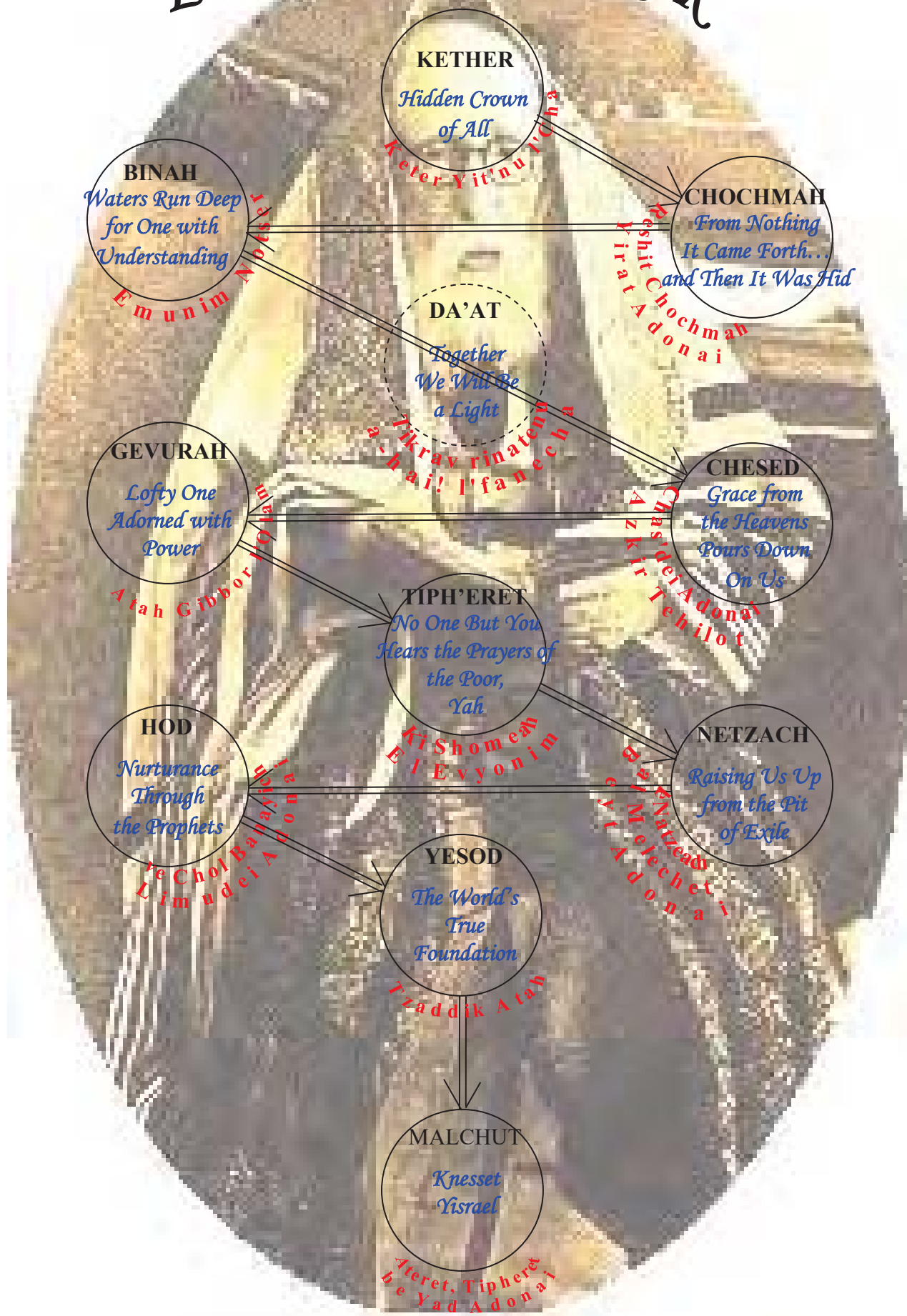
NOTE: An online translation of Tomer Devorah may be found in:

<http://www.digital-brilliance.com/kab/deborah/deborah.htm>

ELMISTATER



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Jachin and Boaz

Like the north Syrian shrine at Tell Tainat, Solomon's edifice had two columns which stood in the portico. Such pillars flanking the main entrance of a temple were common in the first millenium BC in Syria, Phoenicia, and Cyprus. They spread eastward to Assyria where they are to be found in Sargon's temples at Khorsabad (late third century BC) and westward to the Phoenician colonies in the western Mediterranean. In Solomon's temple, following a common Near Eastern custom, they bore the distinctive names "Jachin" and "Boaz". It has been convincingly demonstrated that the names of the two columns represented the first words of dynastic oracles which were inscribed on them. The "Jachin" formula may have been something like

"Yahweh will establish (Hebrew *yakin*) your throne forever"

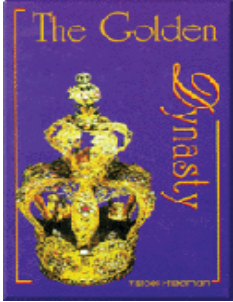
and the "Boaz" oracle may have run something like

"In Yahweh is the king's strength" (Hebrew *boaz*).

Jachin and Boaz have been frequently interpreted as sacred obelisks, like those which stood beside the great Egyptia temples at Heliopolis and Thebes, or beside the temple of Melcarth at Tyre, and it is possible, of course, that Solomon might make concessions to the architectural fads of his day. Sometimes they have been viewed as stylized trees or again as cosmic pillars, like the pillars of Hercules. Robertson Smith suggested, years ago, that they might be gigantic cressets or fire altars.

W.F. Albright adopted Robertson Smith's essential view that Jachin and Boaz were huge cressets or fire altars, using proof from the painted tombs of Marisa in southern Palestine, where similar incense burners appear. Corroborating evidence is also drawn from the Egyptian Djed Pillar, a sacred emblem of Osiris, which bears certain similarities to these collumns. Most important, Albright stressed that each of the shafts of the two pillars is clearly said to be crowned with a *gullah* -- that is, an oil basin of a lampstand (1 Kings 7:41; cf. Zechariah 4:3).

The Rebbe Reb Yisroel of Ruzhin זt"l



The mere mention of the word "*Ruzhin*" is enough to conjure up stories of fabulous wealth and undreamed of treasures. Indeed, the **Rebbe of Ruzhin** was already a legend in his own lifetime. All of his personal belongings, even his everyday cutlery, were made of the most expensive materials. The buttons on his *bekeshes* were made of solid gold, studded with diamonds, and his pillowcase was woven from pure gold thread. Even though the reasons for the Rebbe's conduct were not understood by most people, he was regarded as one of the greatest *tzaddikim* of his time.

Many were the praises heaped on him by the *gedolim* of his era: the Szanzer Rov, the **Divrei Chaim**, said that he could testify that the Rebbe of Ruzhin was constantly *moser nefesh* for *Hashem*, every second of the day. **Reb Moshe Kobrine** exclaimed that even in the times of the *Tanaim* and *Amoraim* the Rebbe would have been considered a special person and that even when he blinks his eyes it's only *lesheim Shomayim*. The **Chidushei HaRim** spent three weeks traveling to the Rebbe in order to speak to him, and he later declared that during the half hour they had spent together, the Rebbe had taken him through half the *Torah*! Similar sentiments were echoed by the **Apter Rov** who used to say that he had never seen anybody as well versed in the *Torah* as the Ruzhiner.

The Rebbe was born to **Reb Sholom, the Rebbe of Prohibisht** (who was a son of **Reb Avrohom HaMalach**, the son of the **Maggid of Mezerich**) and his wife Chava a day after *Rosh Hashana* in the year 1797. Even before he was born they knew that their child was destined for greatness. When the Rebbetzin Chava was pregnant she went to see the **Apter Rov** to ask for his *brocho*. He stood up for her as she came into the room, telling her that he was standing up for the *sefer Torah* she was carrying inside her. As a small child his phenomenal level of *kedusha* was noticeable. When he was only a few years old he would often cry bitter tears but would refuse to disclose the reason for his crying. When his father told him that as a father he has the right to decree that his son tell him the reason for his tears, he answered, "I am thinking to myself how many times I have lifted up my hands today *shelo lesheim Shomayim*."

When Reb Yisroel was six years old he met **Reb Shneur Zalman, the Ba'al HaTanya**. Reb Shneur Zalman later related how deeply impressed he had been with a question the six year old child had asked him. The Rebbe had asked about an apparent contradiction in *Krias Shema*. When a person says the *possuk* of *Shema Yisroel*, he must totally annul himself until he comes to appreciate that *Hashem* is One and that he and everything else cease to exist in comparison. If so, how is it immediately possible to fulfill the next *possuk* of loving *Hashem*, having just totally annulled all personal feelings? In reply, the Ba'al HaTanya told him a very deep explanation which took a few hours to relate, and the Rebbe understood every word.

It was at this time that Reb Yisroel's father, Reb Sholom, was *niftar*, and he was succeeded by his oldest son Reb Avrohom who was just sixteen at the time. Reb Sholom was *niftar* on *erev Sukkos* and the same night Reb Avrohom sat at the head of the table in his father's place. Among Reb Sholom's *chassidim* were a few who were not so happy with the confident attitude of the new young rebbe. They were not pleased that he had become Rebbe without first obtaining the *berocho* of elder *tzaddikim*. Sensing their displeasure, Reb Avrohom related the following story.

There was once a king who spent a fortune building a new palace. When it was finished he invited his subjects to come and view the palace, promising a reward to anyone who could find a fault with any aspect of the new building and furnishings. Among the many experts who came to inspect the building was a simple villager.

The man looked at the beautiful rooms and saw a picture hanging on the wall of a drunken man walking in the street holding a cup of wine. The villager went straight to the king and told him that he had found a major fault with the drawing. In the picture the man was holding a full cup and that was an impossibility. A drunkard sways from side to side and the wine in the cup would certainly have spilled. In reality the cup could be no more than half full. The king agreed with him, rewarding him handsomely.

Pleased with his success, the man looked for more mistakes and soon proclaimed that he had found another fault, this time on a picture of the royal crown. The diamond did not suit the crown at all. This time, however, the king commanded his servants to punish the man for his insolence. The villager could not understand his crime and when he asked for an explanation the king said, "When it comes to a drunkard then you can offer your opinion, but how dare you, an uneducated man, offer an opinion about the royal crown!"

At the age of seven, Reb Yisroel became engaged to the daughter of Reb Moshe, the *Rosh Yeshiva* of Berditchev. **The Berditchever Rov, Reb Levi Yitzchok**, came to the engagement. As he came into the room and saw the *chosson*, he lifted up his eyes and exclaimed, "*Hashem*, You haven't got many *chassonim* like him!"

When Reb Yisroel was thirteen years old the *chasunah* took place. When Reb Yisroel turned sixteen his older brother, Reb Avrohom, was *niftar*, leaving no children. He was then succeeded by Reb Yisroel. Despite his tender age, he immediately began to attract masses of followers. The famous **Chozeh (Seer) of Lublin** said that even though *Chazal* say that a person does not achieve true understanding before he is forty years old, Reb Yisroel was an exception. Similar sentiments were also heard from **Reb Uri of Strelisk**. Before Reb Uri was *niftar* at the age of seventy he instructed his *chassidim* that after his *petirah* they should adopt Reb Yisroel as their Rebbe even though he was then still in his twenties.

Not long after Reb Yisroel became *rebbe*, the famous 'Ostilla Chasunah' took place. To this *chasunah* of two major dynasties came an estimated seventy thousand *chassidim*, including dozens of great *tzaddikim*. The eldest guest was the **Apter Rov**, the grandfather of the *chosson*. As such he sat at the head and was the center of attraction. When the Ruzhiner entered the hall, the Apter Rov called out, "Make way, make way". The Apter Rov's children didn't find it fitting that their father should belittle himself so much, and told their father so. The Apter Rov ignored their pleas telling them, "Do you know who is coming? The *melech Yisroel* is coming."

On another occasion, when Reb Yisroel's *gartel* fell on the floor, the **Apter Rov** picked it up and rewound it around Reb Yisroel's body, saying that he was fulfilling the *mitzva* of *gelilas Sefer Torah*. Stories such as these left a deep impression on the *chassidim* and thousands began to flock to Prohibisht. The building where Reb Yisroel lived became too small and he moved to the town of Ruzhin, not far from Kiev in Russia, by the name of which he is known until today.

Wherever the Rebbe went crowds came to see him. The Rebbe travelled in a beautiful carriage drawn by four white horses. On one occasion, the Rebbe was asked how he keeps himself from having haughty thoughts when he sees the many people pushing to see him. The Rebbe answered the question with a *moshol*.

There was once a king who ruled over a country which was too big for him to control by himself. He therefore appointed a governor over each province. One day the king decided to visit one of his faraway provinces that he had never been to before. When the king arrived he asked the governor to accompany him for a stroll through the main street of the area. As they walked down the street together, crowds began to push each other to get a better view of their governor. The king, however, was not recognized by anyone. In the commotion to see the governor, the king got pushed and shoved around along with everyone else. Can you imagine how embarrassed the governor must have been?

His importance came only from the king, he must have felt terrible to see that the king was getting pushed around. "Similarly", ended the Ruzhiner, "When I see the way people try to honor me, I think to myself, if only they would honor *Hashem* like this as well, and it makes me so upset that the idea of becoming haughty doesn't even occur to me!"

The Rebbe laid great emphasis on sanctifying his thoughts. He regarded it as one of the most important factors of a person's *madreiga*. He constantly exhorted his *chassidim* to strive toward this *madreiga*. At the very least the first thoughts a person has when he wakes up in the morning should be about *Hashem*. These first pure thoughts then stand the person in good stead for the rest of the day, even while he is working or eating. The Rebbe himself testified that if he were left alone in a house without any *seforim* for one hundred years he would not forget about *Hashem* for even one second. Often, from his great *dveikus* in *Hashem*, he would go into a deep trance and remain so for hours at a time. His constant awareness of *Hashem's* presence was noticed by all. The famed *tzaddik*, **Reb Mordechai of Nadvorna**, would say that if one wants to see true fear of *Hashem* one should watch the conduct of the Ruzhiner: his knees would knock together with fright that he was standing in *Hashem's* presence.

One year, on *Rosh Hashana*, no signal was received from the Rebbe's private room that he had finished davening *Shemone Esrei*. The Rebbe's oldest son, **Reb Sholom Yosef**, went into the room and saw that his father was still on the first page of *Shemone Esrei*. Reb Sholom Yosef turned the pages of the *machzor* for his father until the end of *davening*. Later the Ruzhiner explained what had happened. When he realized that he was standing in front of *Hashem*, he suddenly became so overcome with fear that he was unable to move even his arm - as if he had been paralyzed - and therefore was unable to turn over the pages of the *machzor* to continue *davening*.

Although from the outside it appeared that the Rebbe enjoyed all the comforts of this world, nothing could be further from the truth. In reality, the Rebbe afflicted himself terribly, denying his body even the basic necessities. This point is illustrated by the famous story of the Rebbe's boots. The Rebbe used to wear a magnificent pair of boots. It was rumored that even the Czar of Russia was jealous of these boots. Made of solid gold and studded with diamonds and other precious stones, they were the envy of all who beheld them. Once on a bitterly cold night the Rebbe went out in his boots to sanctify the New Moon. The Rebbe stood for a long time in the snow davening. When he left, the *chassidim* noticed blood where he had been standing.

An investigation of the Rebbe's boots revealed that they had no sole. Every time the Rebbe wore them he was really walking barefoot and when he stood on the snow his feet became stuck to the icy ground, causing them to bleed when he left. When this story became known, even those people who had until then been opposed to his extravagant life style, bowed their heads in deference, acknowledging that the Rebbe's every action was only for the sake of Heaven and not for his own pleasure.

The Rebbe would go for days on end without eating. On one occasion he commented that when the time came for him to be born, his *neshomo* did not want to descend into this lowly world until the body promised the *neshomo* that it would not partake of this world, only what it would need for its basic survival.

When the Rebbe was asked why he chose to follow an extravagant life style unlike the other *tzaddikim* of the time who lived in poverty, he answered as follows, "We find that the two traits of humility and wisdom are entwined with one another. Only somebody who is truly wise can acquire the trait of humility, and similarly, only someone who is truly humble can become wise. **Moshe Rabbeinu** is called the most humble of men, and if so, he must have also been the wisest. **Shlomo Hamelech** is known as the wisest of all men and therefore must have also been the most humble. The reason Moshe is praised for his humility is because a *rov* has the right to be *mochel* on his *kovod*. A king however, even if he wants to, may not be *mochel* on his *kovod* (*melech shemochal al kevodo, ein kvodo mochul*).

Therefore Shlomo could only be praised for his wisdom. "What can I do," said the Rebbe, "it has been thrust on me from Heaven to take the way of royalty. It wasn't my choice and I haven't the ability to exempt myself from this *derech*."

In keeping with this *derech* the Rebbe would often comment that a *Yid's* biggest *aveiro* is when he forgets that he is a '*ben hamelech*' a son of *Hashem*. As long as a person remembers who he is, he is less likely to fall to lower standards.

The Rebbe's fame spread far and wide and people came to see him from all over. From Germany, **Reb Shamshon Refoel Hirsch** travelled specially to Ruzhin. Afterwards, when he was asked what impression the Rebbe had made on him, he answered: "It is quite unbelievable to see how all the money and *kovod* is brought to him, and he himself is totally uninterested in it. His one and only concern is how to increase *kovod Shomayim* and the *kovod* of *Klal Yisroel*."

Indeed, the Rebbe was constantly occupied with trying to lift the *Yidden* up from their poverty and problems. As a small child he used to go to the cattle market and tell the butchers which animals were treif and therefore shouldn't be bought. When the Rebbe's father heard of this he ordered his son to cease this practice. The young Ruzhiner protested that he wanted to save the *Yiddishe* butchers from losing their money.

The Rebbe sought to lighten the heavy burden of the *Yidden* as much as possible. When it was decreed that all the *Yidden* had to change their way of dress to that of the *goyim*, most of the *poskim* of the time held that a person should give up his life rather than change his mode of dress. When the Rebbe was asked what he held, he answered, "Yaakov Ovinu received the *brochos* from his father Yitzchok dressed in Eisov's clothes."

Even people who had fallen from the correct path could also hear a warm word from the Rebbe. In the times of the **Baal Shem Tov** and his disciples, it was mainly the elite that found a place at the rebbe's table. The Ruzhiner however sought to include even the simple and unlearned. He would constantly remind his *chassidim* about the importance of being with a rebbe. He would say that even if they didn't learn anything new whilst in Ruzhin, it was still worth the effort to come.

Although always occupied with lofty thoughts, the Rebbe was able to speak to every person on his own level. When a simple person told him that he didn't know how to do *teshuva*, the Rebbe retorted, "And to sin you did know? You just did it without thinking twice and later you realized that you had done an *aveiro*. Now too if you start mending your ways the *teshuva* will follow automatically."

To another person, the Rebbe advised that his *teshuva* would be to daven only using a *siddur*. Even the smallest *brocho* should only be said from a *siddur*. In due course, this *baal teshuva* became known as a well respected *tzaddik*.

The Rebbe would do his utmost to help others. He would say that just like metal becomes hot when placed in fire and freezing cold when placed in the cold, similarly he himself feels the pain and suffering of every *Yid* from one end of the world to the other. Not for nothing did the aged **Rebbe of Vorka, Reb Yitzchok zt'l**, proclaim that *ahavas Yisroel* such as he had seen in Ruzhin was not to be found anywhere else!

When news arrived in Ruzhin of an evil decree against the *Yidden*, the Rebbe would lock himself up for weeks at a time in his private quarters to *daven* that *Hashem* annul the decree. At such times it was literally impossible to see or speak to him: not even his closest family or *gabboim* were granted access.

In his *tefillos* the Rebbe would constantly be *melamed zechus* on the *Yidden*. He would often repeat that when the Berdichever *Rov* would see a person carrying his *tallis* and *tefillin* on the way to *shul*, he would remark about the *tzidkus* of such a person who leaves his warm bed every morning in order please *Hashem*. If so, then what can one say nowadays when a person who leaves his home to go to *shul* doesn't know if his children are going to be snatched away to the army while he is out. Such a person can be likened to the Baal Shem Tov himself!

The Rebbe cared not only for the *Yidden* in his vicinity but also for those from far and wide. He took a special interest in helping those living in *Eretz Yisroel*. At that time it was extremely difficult to live in *Eretz Yisroel*. Only four thousand *frum Yidden* inhabited the land in very primitive conditions. A large number of them lived on money sent by *Kollel Volhin*. This organization administrated most of the needs of those in the Holy Land.

The Rebbe, who headed the *Kollel Volhin*, was in charge of raising and distributing the money to the needy. As a direct descendent of **Dovid Hamelech**, the Rebbe felt that it was his duty to see to their welfare. Anyone who wanted to emigrate to *Eretz Yisroel* had first to obtain the Rebbe's permission, otherwise he would not receive money from the *Kollel*. The Rebbe insisted that every person going to live in *Eretz Yisroel* must be able to support himself for the first three years, only afterwards would he be paid by the *Kollel*. Through this the burden was eased on those already there.



The Ruzhiner shul "Tiferes Yisroel" (Nisan Bak Shul)
in the old city of Yerushalayim

The Ruzhiner shul "Tiferes Yisroel"
(Nisan Bak Shul) in the Old City of Jerusalem

When word reached the Rebbe that the Russian Czar intended to build a big church in the Old City of Yerushalayim, the Rebbe summoned **Reb Nisan Bak** who lived in Yerushalayim and was one of the Rebbe's faithful *chassidim*. The Rebbe gave him a sum of money and told him to rush and buy the plot of land before the Russians do so. Reb Nisan arrived there a few days ahead of the Russians and succeeded in buying the plot of land. When the Czar heard that the land had been snatched out of his hands he exploded in a fit of rage about the Rebbe who always got in his way. The Czar was forced to buy a different plot of land, known today as the Russian Compound. With the money the Rebbe sent, a big shul was built. The shul was known as the "Reb Nisan Bak Shul" and stood until 1948 when it was destroyed by the Arabs.

Although the Rebbe longed to go and settle in *Eretz Yisroel*, he was unable to forsake his *chassidim*. He used to say that if he came to *Eretz Yisroel* he would be asked why he had come without his *Yidden*. On one occasion the Rebbe spoke about the final *geula* and said that it would begin with the gradual emigration of *Yidden* to *Eretz Yisroel*. Just as in the times of Ezra there was no miraculous redemption as in Egypt, similarly in our times if the generation will not be worthy, the redemption will also take place in a natural way.

The countries of the world will decide to give the *Yidden Eretz Yisroel* as a land of their own and the *Yidden* will come back and rebuild the land. There will be great miracles but they will be hidden in the circle of nature, and after this we will see the final redemption. As the Rebbe finished these words he sighed and said, "Of course it bothers us that the *geula* should start in such a way, but we have no more strength to wait. However it will be, let it start already."

The Russian Czar and the various *maskilim* of the time were greatly distressed by the power the Rebbe wielded. Through his royal conduct the Rebbe greatly uplifted the level of the downtrodden masses. The *maskilim* had long been plotting to bring about the Rebbe's downfall, but without any success. When the Rebbe was forty years old, he was arrested on charges of having had a hand in a murder. An informer brought evidence that the Rebbe had ordered the execution of a second informer. As the Rebbe was taken away into custody he said, "'*Gam ki eilech be'gei tzalmoves lo iro ra,*' even as I am to be locked up I am not afraid. One thing however upsets me, '*ki atto imodi*', that You, *Hashem*, will be with me, the *Shechina* will also be in *Golus* with me.

Following the orders of the Czar himself, the Rebbe was locked up in the notorious Kiev dungeons. The Rebbe spent twenty two months locked away under terrible conditions in a small dark and damp cellar. No charges were ever brought against him, nor was he ever put on trial. The Rebbe was then transferred to a second prison in Kamenitz for six months until he was finally freed on *Shushan Purim*. A few days after the Rebbe was freed he was given a tip off that the Czar had decided to rearrest him on charges of rebellion and had already passed a sentence of life exile to Siberia. The Rebbe was left with no option but to flee Russia.

As soon as the authorities realized that the Rebbe had disappeared, soldiers were sent to look for him and prevent his escape. The Rebbe crossed the border into Austria in the middle of the night, and the Russians, having narrowly missed recapturing him, returned home empty-handed. The Russian Czar, however, did not give up and demanded that Austria send the Rebbe back to Russia.

Meanwhile, 'witnesses' were produced who testified that the Rebbe was really an Austrian citizen who had disappeared many years ago and had finally returned home to Austria. The Russians, however, also had witnesses to contradict this story and insisted on his return. The Austrian Government, however, refused to comply. They knew that the Rebbe would attract tens of thousands of *chassidim* who were good for the economy and businesses of the area. The Rebbe was simply too valuable an asset to lose.

When **Reb Yitzchok of Vorka** came to visit the Rebbe soon after he arrived in Austria, the Rebbe told him that he had not been imprisoned for his own sins, for in his life he had never transgressed even the smallest *issur derabonon*.

Not long after the Rebbe settled in Austria he was asked by one of his *chassidim* why he didn't take revenge against the Russian Czar. Everyone knew that the Rebbe was able to work miracles, so why didn't he see to destroy the Czarist regime?

"Do you believe in all the miracles that took place when *Hashem* took the *Yidden* out of Egypt?" the Rebbe asked him.

"Of course I believe," answered the *Yid*.

"And do you believe that *Hashem* has still the same power to perform such miracles?" the Rebbe continued, and the *Yid* answered him again, "Of course, Rebbe, I believe!"

"If so," the Rebbe asked him, "can you explain to me why *Hashem* doesn't punish the Czar for all his wicked actions?" If *Hashem* doesn't feel that it is time to punish him, what's the wonder if I also keep quiet?"

The time came however, that the Rebbe felt he could not keep quiet any longer. A few days before *Purim* the Rebbe asked that one of his *chassidim* dress up as the Russian Czar on *Purim*. The *chassidim* understood that the Rebbe had deep *kavonos* in his request, and it wasn't just going to be a show. On *Purim* the Rebbe was in the middle of his *Purim Seuda*, when suddenly the door opened and in walked the dressed up Czar.

The Rebbe rose respectfully to his feet and addressed the Czar. "Your Majesty the Czar, you have decreed harsh decrees against my people, I ask you, please annul these harsh decrees."

The Czar however refused: it was impossible to retract. The Rebbe's face became more serious as he once again asked, "Please, I beg of His Majesty to have pity and rescind the decrees."

"No, it is impossible, it cannot be done," the Czar answered with impudence.

The Rebbe's face turned white and, getting up from his chair, the Rebbe came over to the Czar and in an emotional voice ordered him immediately to leave the room and never return. Afterwards the Rebbe sunk down into his chair and in a broken voice he said, "*Chazal* tell us '*Ein lecho odom she'ein lo sho'oh*', every person comes to the world to fulfill a specific task, if this *chossid* would have realized that he should have agreed to annul the decrees, automatically in Russia they would also have been annulled. A great pity that this opportunity has been lost."

The Rebbe settled in the town of **Sadiger**. Some years earlier **Reb Chaim Kosover** had promised the people of the town that one day a great *tzaddik* would come to live there, and he make the name "Sadiger" famous for all generations. Once again the Rebbe set up a magnificent court with a big *shul*. Tens of thousands flocked to Sadiger, and indeed all the people of the area became his *chassidim*. The Rebbe lived in Sadiger for ten years until his *petirah*. A few months before he was *niftar* he started to drop broad hints of his imminent departure. Just before *Rosh Hashana* 1851 he told his sons that he had prepared extremely beautiful living quarters for himself and he would be moving there after the *Yomim Tovim* are over. As he walked into his *Beis Hamedrash* on *Yom Kippur*, he put his hands on the *mezuzah* and announced that he would be a *kaporo* for *Klal Yisroel*. Right after *Sukkos* the Rebbe became ill and was *niftar* on the third of *Cheshvan*.

A few hours before he was *niftar* he asked one of his close *chassidim* if he knew what Esther *davened* before she went to Achashverosh. Without waiting for an answer the Rebbe himself answered, "She asked *Hashem* that He either help the *Yidden* or take her from this world." These were the Rebbe's last words before his *petirah*: "Reb Yehuda Hanossi testified about himself that he never had enjoyment from this world, not even the amount of a small finger, and I testify on myself that I didn't enjoy this world not even the amount of a bit of thread (*kechut hasa'ara*). The reason for my grand and royal conduct was totally *Lesheim Shomayim*."

With these words the Rebbe was *niftar*. He was only fifty four years old. The doctor who examined him diagnosed that the Rebbe had been *niftar* because his heart had given way in its longing to be reunited with its Creator. The Rebbe's son, **Reb Avrohom Yaakov**, used to say that just as on *Shabbos*, *Gehennom* is shut, the same is on his father's *yahrtzeit*, the third of *Cheshvan*, *Gehennom* is also closed. This statement can be reinforced with a story which occurred about eighty years ago.

A lady whose father was *niftar* on the third of *Cheshvan* had a dream a few days later in which her father appeared to her and told her that since he had died on the Ruzhiner's *yahrtzeit* he was let straight into *Gan Eden*. The lady immediately wrote to her brothers and sisters who lived in different towns in Europe, informing them of her dream. A few weeks later she received letters from all of her brothers and sisters and each one told over the same dream that she had. And each one had the dream on the same night!

The Rebbe's *derech* was carried on through his six sons. Each of them moved to a different town where they set up their own court. The Rebbe thought very highly of all his sons. He used to say that just like one used to come to ask the *urim vetumim* in the times of the *Beis Hamikdash*, in the same way one will come to ask them for advice. The Rebbe's oldest son, **Reb Sholom Yosef**, was *niftar* less than a year after his father and was succeeded by his son **Reb Yitzchok**, who became the first **Bohusher Rebbe**. The Ruzhiner's second son, **Reb Avrohom Yaakov**, took his father's place in Sadiger. He had two sons, the eldest, **Reb Yitzchok**, was the first **Boyaner Rebbe** and the younger son, **Reb Yisroel**, was rebbe in **Sadiger**. The third son of the Ruzhiner was **Reb Dov Ber** who was rebbe in **Lieov** and the fourth son, **Reb Menachem Nachum**, was rebbe in **Sthefanesht**. **Reb Dovid Moshe, the Chortkover Rebbe**, was the fifth son and **Reb Mordechai Shraga, the Husyatiner Rebbe**, was the sixth son.

In addition to his sons, the Ruzhiner also had four daughters. The eldest daughter - **Chaya Malka**, was married to Reb Yitzchok of Skver. The next daughter - **Gitel**, was married to Reb Yosef Mansohn. Their elder son Reb Levi Yitzchok was rebbe in Ozeranah and their second son Reb Chaim Dov was rebbe in Brod. The third daughter - **Miriam**, was married to **Reb Menachem Mendel of Vishnitz**, founder of the famous **Vishnitzer** dynasty. The last daughter - **Leah**, was married to Reb Dovid Halpern. Their son, **Reb Sholom Halpern**, was the founder of the **Vasloier** dynasty. Through his six sons the Ruzhiner *Chassidus* spread far and wide, bringing *Yidden* closer to their Father in Heaven *ad bi'as go'el tzedek. Amen*.

Husiatyn (Hasidic dynasty) - Wikipedia

Husiatyn is the name of a [Hasidic dynasty](#), whose founder was a scion of the [Ruzhiner](#) dynasty. [Husiatyn](#) is located in present-day [Ukraine](#).

It started with the [Rebbe](#) Rabbi Mordechai Shraga Feivish Friedman, the youngest son of Rabbi [Israel Friedmann](#) of Rizhin. Reb Mordechai Shraga Feivish was only 16 when his father died and when he turned 30 in 1865, he moved to [Husiatyn](#) where he established a large Hasidic court. He died during the spring of 1894 and was succeeded by his son Reb Yisroel who took over the position of rebbe in Husiatyn until 1912. At the outbreak of [World War I](#), he together with other Rebbes of Rizhin moved to [Vienna](#), subsequently settling there. From time to time he made trips to visit his chassidim that remained in [Galicia](#).

The [Admorim](#) of Rizhin were known for their love of the [Land of Israel](#), and Reb Yisroel's feelings were especially deep. When one of the rebbes of Rizhin died, plans were made to establish a Rizhin section in the Jewish cemetery in Vienna. The rebbe of Husiatyn stated that there would be no need to take him into account as he proposed to emigrate to [Eretz Israel](#). And so it was, during the 1930s, Reb Yisroel made plans to make [aliyah](#). He traveled around [Europe](#) to bid farewell to his followers and warn them of the impending danger. He urged them to make aliyah and leave Europe.

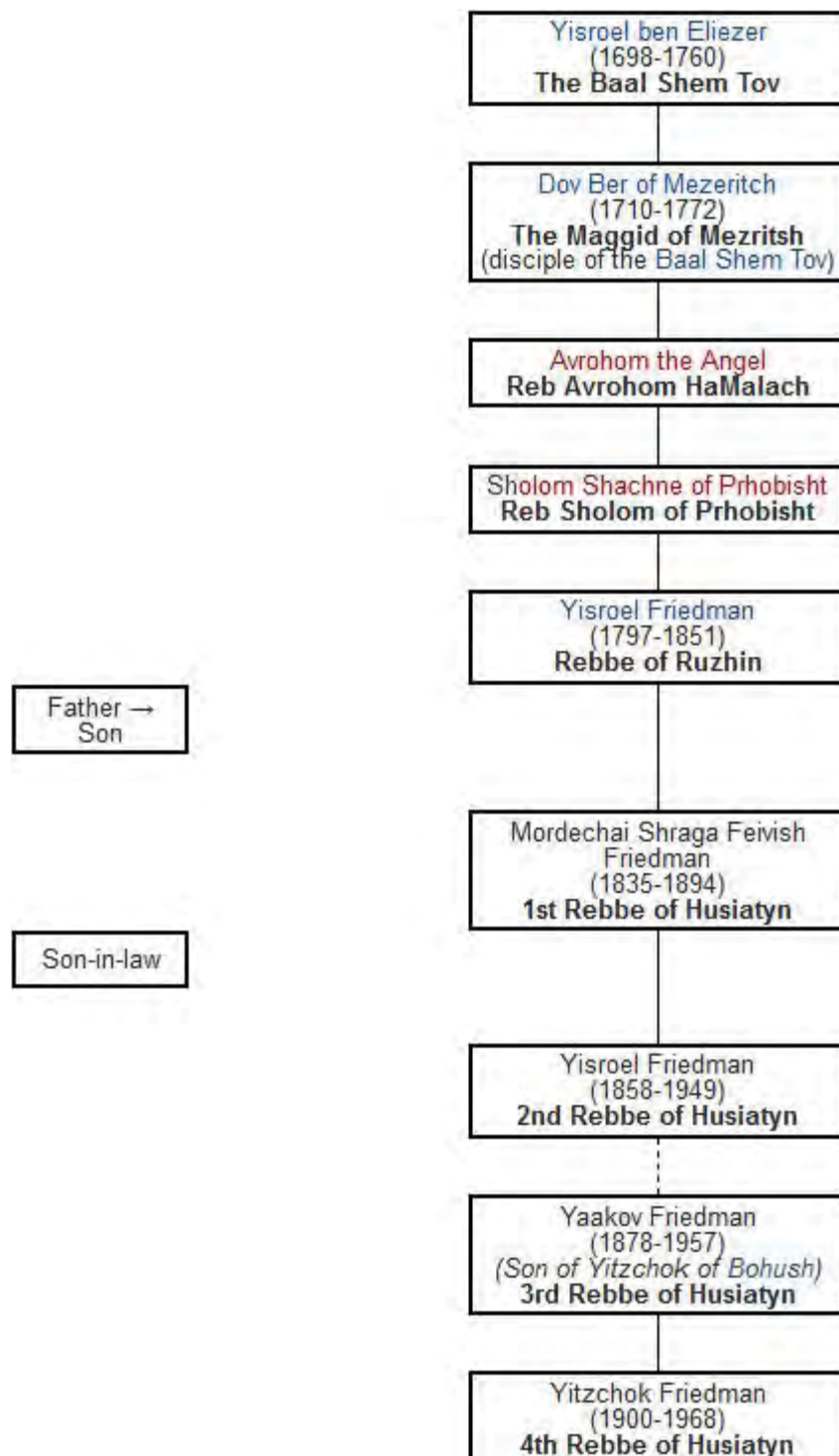
As a result of the increased [anti-Semitism](#) he had witnessed, himself being a victim of stone throwers in a Viennese street, he had visions of what was to befall the Jewish people in the years to come. In [Cracow](#) he was reported to have instructed: "Whoever has some sense should flee while he can - even in his slippers!" To the Jews who came to the train station in [Lvov](#) to greet him he said: "Whoever can sell his property should do so, and those who are unable to sell should leave everything and flee from here, even if only with a sack on his back!"

In 1937 the rebbe docked at [Haifa](#) and settled in Tel Aviv. Aged 80 and the only surviving grandson of the [Rizhiner Rebbe](#), he was considered the "elder" of the rebbes of Rizhin. During the summer months he would reside in [Jerusalem](#) until the 3rd of [cheshvan](#), the [yartzeit](#) of his grandfather. On that day he would visit the [Western Wall](#) and go to pray at the grave of the holy [Ohr Hachaim](#) on the [Mount of Olives](#).

He led his Hasidim for over 50 years until he died in Tel Aviv aged 92. In his [will](#) he requested to be buried on the Mount of Olives and if that was not possible, in [Safad](#) or [Tiberias](#). When he died on the fifth day of [Hanukkah](#) 1949, the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem was inaccessible being under Jordanian control. As he died on a Friday there was also not enough time to organise a plot in the ancient Jewish cemetery in Safed. He was therefore buried in Tiberias amongst the students of the [Baal Shem Tov](#).

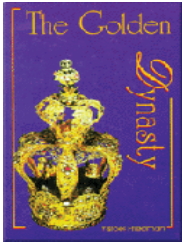
His son-in-law, Rabbi Yaakov Freidman, a son of the [Bohusher](#) Rebbe, Rabbi Yitzchok Friedman, was appointed as the new leader. He continued the dynasty until his death in 1957 when his son Reb Yitzchok took over. Reb Yitzchok only had one son, Mordechai Shraga, who died at a young age. When Reb Yitzchok died in 1968, the Husiatyn dynasty ended. Today the Husiatyn [Beth midrash](#) on Bialik Street, Tel Aviv, continues to be used for prayer and study.

Lineage of the Husiatyn dynasty



The Husyatiner Rebbes

Reb Mordechai Shraga and Reb Yisroel *zt'l*



The youngest of the **Ruzhiner's** six sons, **Reb Mordechai Shraga** was born to his father on the twentieth of *Iyar* 5595 (1835). Before Reb Mordechai Shraga was born, the Ruzhiner told his *chassidim* that he would bring a lofty and holy *neshomo* (soul) down to this world, the likes of which hasn't been for many generations.

Not long after Reb Mordechai Shraga's birth, one of the famous Rebbes of the period, **Reb Moshe Savronna *zt'l***, came to visit the Ruzhiner. The Ruzhiner showed him the many valuable and precious possessions he owned, and after Reb Moshe Savronner had seen them all, the Ruzhiner told him, "Now I will show you my most precious possession," and with that he asked that his youngest son be brought into the room.

Once, when **Reb Mordechai Shraga** was three years old he was seen with a piece of cake in his hand, crying bitter tears. One of the *chassidim* went up to him and asked him why he was crying. Reb Mordechai Shraga answered, "I am very hungry and I want to eat." "So why don't you eat the piece of cake in your hand?" the *chossid* asked him. "Our father taught us that if one wants something, one may not have it," the young child answered.

In Ruzhin, the *minhag* (custom) was that during the Friday night *davening* they didn't sing *Lecho Dodi*. Instead it was chanted without a melody. It once happened that a *chazan* who was not familiar with the Ruzhiner's *minhogim* come to Ruzhin and sang *Lecho Dodi*. After *davening*, Reb Mordechai Shraga, who was still a young child, went over to the *chazan* and said to him, "Do you know the translation of *Lecho Dodi*?", and without waiting for an answer he continued, "*Shomor ve-zochor be-dibbur echod* (Guard and Remember in one utterance was said). A person must be careful and must remember, *be-dibbur*, in his every word, *echod* (one), not to forget the One and Only *Hashem*. And by you this is a song...?"

The *chassidim* would say that from these words of Reb Mordechai Shraga it was apparent that he would not be an orator. Their words were borne out and even many years later when he was Rebbe to thousands of *chassidim* he refrained from saying *Torah* at a *tish* (Chassidic gathering, Rebbe's table). Even when speaking to his *chassidim*, he never engaged in lengthy conversations but limited his replies to a few words.

Reb Mordechai Shraga was only sixteen years old when his father was *niftar*, but despite his tender age he attracted many of his father's *chassidim*. As a young man he once had to undergo an operation on one of his fingers. The doctor told him to drink a potion which would make him fall asleep. Reb Mordechai Shraga told the doctor that he could perform the operation on him whilst he was fully awake, and he stuck out his finger for the doctor to start. During the operation the Rebbe sat calmly without showing even the slightest discomfort.

Reb Mordechai Shraga moved to Husyatyn in 1865 where he established a large court. His *chassidim* numbered in the thousands, amongst them many *Rabbonim* and *Gedolei Yisroel*. Most of his day was spent in total *dveikus* (spiritual attachment) with his Creator. He would sit still without moving for hours on end, his face a ghostly white, his eyes turned upwards so that just the white of the eyes could be seen. Sometimes the *gabboim* became frightened for it appeared as if he was no longer among the living; they would bang on his table until he finally aroused himself from his deep *dveikus*.

Every *Motzoei Shabbos*, **Reb Mordechai Shraga** drank a cup of coffee. On one occasion the *gabai* (attendant) brought in the coffee but the Rebbe ignored it, leaving it until it became cold. The *gabai* brought in a second cup and again the Rebbe left it standing until it too became cold. After the *gabai* had brought in the coffee for the third time Reb Mordechai Shraga told him, "Every *erev Shabbos* the *neshomo yeseirah* (extra soul of Shabbos) comes down into a person's body. On its arrival the *neshomo* asks the *neshomo yeseirah* to influence the body that it should also feel the *kedusha* and *tahara* of *Shabbos*. When *Motzoei Shabbos* comes, the weekday *neshomo* returns to supervise the body for the coming week. On its arrival, the *neshomo* asks the *neshomo yeseirah* if it managed to achieve anything during the course of *Shabbos*. All is well and good if the answer is positive, but if the *neshomo yeseirah* says, 'Not only have I not achieved anything, moreover, I have undone what was already accomplished', the *neshomos* start to cry and wail." And the Rebbe ended, "When one hears them crying, how can one possibly drink anything?"

Before his *petirah* the Rebbe became seriously ill, and his brother, the **Chortkover Rebbe, Reb Dovid Moshe zt'l**, came to visit him. On his arrival in Husyatin, the Chortkover Rebbe asked to see all of his brother's personal belongings, his *tefillin*, his clothes and his *seforim* (books). Only after he had checked them all, did he enter his brother's room to wish him a *refuah shleimah* (a complete recovery). A few days later, Reb Mordechai Shraga's condition took a turn for the worse and his two daughters left for Chortkov to plead with their uncle to *daven* for his recovery. When they arrived in Chortkov they told Reb Dovid Moshe about their father's condition. Reb Dovid Moshe told them, "I just recently visited your father. Whilst I was there, I examined all his personal belongings and I wasn't able to find even the smallest fault which could have caused an accusation against him to make him so ill. It seems that he himself has no desire to stay in this world any longer...."

Reb Mordechai Shraga was *niftar* on the thirty seventh day of the *Omer* 5654 (1894) and was succeeded by his son Reb Yisroel. Reb Yisroel led his *chassidim* for over fifty years until his *petirah* (death) on the twenty ninth of *Kislev* 5709 (1949) on the fifth night of *Chanukah*. Despite the fact that during the many years he was Rebbe he hardly ever uttered a *dvar Torah* (a Torah thought), Reb Yisroel's *chassidim* numbered in the thousands, including quite a number of famous *rabbonim* and *gedolim*.

The **Rebbe Reb Boruch'l of Mezhibuzh** used to say that a faulty candle flickers and dances, but a good candle stays still, burning steadily, and thereby gives off a bright light. Similarly, a person has to remain calm and steady and not jump and prance like a faulty candle. The life of the Husyatiner Rebbe was like that of a good candle. He never allowed any of his inner feelings to show before his onlookers. His *tefillos* (prayers) were the picture of simplicity, no moans or groans ever left his lips. His body remained still, rooted to the spot where he stood without the slightest *shockle*, and he said every word from the *siddur* (prayerbook). Even when reciting *Kaddish* in front of his *chassidim*, he paused while turning a page in order not to miss a single word from the *siddur*.

Behind this facade of simplicity was hidden one of the true *tzaddikim* of his generation. **The Belzer Rov, Reb Aharon zt'l**, never referred to **Reb Yisroel** as 'The Husyatiner Rebbe'. He used to call him 'The Rebbe,' an honor which he did not bestow on any other *tzaddik*.

Born on the sixteenth of *Kislev* 5618 (1858), he was given the name Yisroel after his father's father, **Reb Yisroel, the Rebbe of Ruzhin**. When he was only three years old his extraordinary level of *kedusha* was seen by all. A local *goy* had long been interested in seeing the inside of the court of Reb Mordechai Shraga. The *goy* got hold of a *bekeshe* (long coat) and hat and, disguised as a *Yid*, he entered the Rebbe's *beis hamedrash* (shul, study hall). No sooner did the three year old Reb Yisroel catch a glimpse of the dressed up peasant than he began to scream, 'Goy, goy!'

When **Reb Yisroel** turned thirteen, his father Reb Mordechai Shraga was *mechanech* (educated) his son to *tefillin*. Before Reb Yisroel donned the *tefillin* for the first time, his father told him the following story, "Some of the **Mezreticher Maggid's** *chassidim* once complained to the Maggid that due to the long distance involved, it was very difficult for them to ask him for advice every time a problem arose. The Maggid gave them one of his *bekeshes* (coats) and a *gartel* (prayer sash) and walking stick, and instructed the *chassidim* to hand them over to Mendel from Vitebsk. The *chassidim* wasted no time, and although there were quite a number of Mendels in Vitebsk, they handed over the items to the first Mendel they found. No sooner had Reb Mendel put on the *bekeshe* and *gartel* than he appeared to become a different person. His face radiated holiness on his entire surroundings. The *chassidim* stood up in awe before the inspiring figure and accepted him as their new leader. He became as famous as **Reb Mendel of Vitebsk**.

Reb Mordechai Shraga told his son that when *tefillin* adorn the body, they can transform the person who wears them into a holy being with their holiness. With these words Reb Mordechai Shraga put *tefillin* on his son.

When **Reb Yisroel** turned fourteen he married Nechama Gitel, a granddaughter of his uncle **Reb Avrohom Yaakov, the Rebbe of Sadiger**. After his *chasunah* (wedding) he returned to Husyatin to learn under his father's guidance.

Reb Mordechai Shraga taught his son to appreciate that not only does every word a person utters have to be weighed and examined to see that it is totally truthful, but every thought and action also has to be carefully scrutinized to make sure that it does not give a false impression of any sort. Indeed, by the time Reb Mordechai Shraga was niftar in 5654 (1894), Reb Yisroel was famous all over Galicia for his *tzidkus* (righteousness). No unnecessary comment ever escaped his lips. On one occasion when he went to visit **Reb Dovid Moshe, the Chortkover Rebbe**, Reb Dovid Moshe told his son to look at Reb Yisroel, saying, "You see my son, this is the *emes* (truth)."

Typical of his dedication to truth through and through, **Reb Yisroel** never used silver plated cutlery. He used either solid silver or plain metal cutlery. He said that the idea of silver plating is to pass off plain metal as solid silver. The inside is different to what it appears to be from the outside. Therefore, he felt that it was untruthful to use such cutlery.

When an old couch was reupholstered, the carpenter informed **Reb Yisroel** that he had not redone the part underneath the seat. Since that part is not visible the carpenter thought that there was no need to cover it. Reb Yisroel did not agree and asked him to reupholster that section, telling him, "With us, what we see and what we don't see are the same!"

When **Reb Yisroel** gave his first *tish* as Rebbe, he took off his *gartel*, quoting the words of *Chazal* in *maseches Shabbos*, "Loosening the belt signifies the beginning of a meal." The *chassidim* understood this to mean that a person only has a right to eat if he no longer requires a belt to distinguish between the top and the bottom half of the body - the holy and the mundane.

The Rebbe never spoke during a *tish*. It was conducted in total silence except for the few traditional *niggunim* (melodies) that were sung. The *chassidim* used to say that in Husyatin one serves *Hashem* through silence. When a person is silent his innermost thoughts can surface, enabling him to contemplate truly his position and *madreiga* (spiritual level). The total lack of any external actions assists the person to see who he really is. Indeed, even the local *goyim* would joke that in Husyatin the *chassidim* came to hear the Rebbe who didn't speak!

The Rebbe's fame spread even to the *goyim* in the area. Near Husyatín lived a wealthy *poritz* (non-Jewish landowner), Count Glochovsky, who often conversed with the Rebbe about various matters. On one occasion, the Count told the Rebbe that as a token of his appreciation he would like to show the Rebbe his most precious possession. The Rebbe agreed to visit the Count, and on the appointed day the Count's carriage came to bring the Rebbe to the Count's palace. When the Rebbe was sitting in the palatial house, the Count went to open his safe but the safe would not budge despite vigorous attempts to open it. A red faced Count returned to apologize for causing the Rebbe to come for nothing. He just could not understand why the safe would not open. Such a thing had never happened before! Later, it became known that the Count had wanted to show the Rebbe an ancient golden cross that he had received from the Pope. *Min haShomayim* (from Heaven) the Rebbe had been saved from seeing the defiled object.

Although the Rebbe hardly ever said *divrei Torah* in public, he was extremely well versed in all parts of the *Torah*. The Rebbe's nephew, **Reb Moshenu Boyaner zt'l**, who was considered one of the foremost *poskim* in Poland, used to say that he could testify that his uncle was fluent in every *Rambam*. Similar comments were echoed by the Rebbe's son-in-law, **Reb Yaakov zt'l**, who was also famed as a major *talmid chochom*. Reb Yaakov used to say that he had acquired from his father-in-law most of his knowledge during their daily *chavrusa* (joint study session)!

Although the Rebbe never volunteered his opinion, if a *rov* (Rabbi) pressed him to answer he would not refuse. One such *rov* was **Reb Yitzchok Isaac Herzog**, (later a chief Rabbi of Israel) who used to say that the Rebbe had, literally, an encyclopedic knowledge of *hilchos mikva'os* (the laws of Mikveh). Another *rov*, **Reb Fishel Arik zt'l**, once accompanied the Rebbe on an inspection tour of an *eruv*. Reb Fishel later said that during the inspection the Rebbe had shown that he was familiar with all the opinions mentioned in the *poskim* about even the most minute *sha'alos* (question) in *hilchos eruvim*. Indeed, when they became aware of the true extent of the Rebbe's vast knowledge, most *rabbonim* were confounded by his ability to contain himself and not allow the *Torah* within him to gush forth. It was said that in order to really understand the Rebbe's '*pashtus*' (simplicity) one had to be a true '*amkan*!' (person of depth)

Another aspect of the Rebbe's conduct that aroused much comment was that he constantly checked his appearance to make sure that he was totally spotless and not even one hair was out of place. To this end he always carried with him a small mirror and comb. Before every *tefillah* or any other *mitzva* he carefully checked himself to ensure that he was respectable to appear in front of *Hashem*. When the Rebbe's wife was *niftar* in (5652) 1892, as the Rebbe was about to leave his house to go to the *levaya*, he suddenly stopped and exclaimed, "I am about to perform the *mitzva* of *halvoya* *hameis* (accompanying the dead) and I almost forgot to check my appearance."



In a Viennese street. From right to left: Reb Yaakov of Husyatín, Reb Yisroel of Husyatín and Reb Avrohom Yehoshua of Kapischnitz

Although such conduct was not seen by other *tzaddikim*, the *sefer* Meshivas Nefesh from **Rabbeinu Yochanan Luria** (who lived in the time of the Maharshal) explains that the reason the *kiyor* (wash stand) in the *Mishkan* (tabernacle) was made from mirrors (*mar'os*) was so the *cohanim* could check themselves to ensure that they appeared presentable when performing the *avoda* (service) in front of *Hashem*. *Chazal* also tell us that when Hillel went to the bathhouse he used to say that he was going to perform a *mitzva*. The statues erected in honor of various dignitaries were constantly cleaned and polished, all the more so a person, who was created in the image of *Hashem*, must be careful that he is clean and tidy.

With the outbreak of the First World War the town of Husyatin was badly damaged, and the Rebbe was forced to flee to Vienna where he settled together with the other Rebbes of the Ruzhiner dynasty.

With the founding of Agudas Yisroel the Rebbe straight away joined the movement. He did not, however, stay a member for long. At a meeting he had attended, a certain *rov* verbally attacked the ideas of the Chortkover Rebbe, *zt'l*, and in doing so also slighted the *kovod* (honor) of the Chortkover Rebbe. When the *rov* finished his *drosho* (speech) the Rebbe handed in his resignation, saying it had hurt him so much to hear the way this *rov* had that he no longer wanted to be a member.

On one occasion when the Rebbe went for a walk in the town of Stanislav, he paused outside a particular house and asked who lived in this house. He said that he could feel a high level of *kedusha* emanating from its walls. The *chassidim* explained that when the Chortkover Rebbe *zt'l* comes to Stanislav this is where he stays. "Ah," sighed the Rebbe, "that's it." The Chortkover Rebbe admired the Rebbe greatly and on one occasion when they parted from each other the Chortkover Rebbe put his hand on the collar of the Rebbe's coat - as one would do to straighten a crooked collar - and then he kissed his hand as if he had just kissed a *mezuza*!

Although the Rebbe longed to settle in Eretz Yisroel, he felt unable to abandon his many *chassidim*. One day during the 1930s whilst he was walking down a street in Vienna some local *goyim* threw stones in his direction. The Rebbe saw this as a sign from Heaven that it was time for him to leave Europe and settle in *Eretz Yisroel*, and the necessary preparations were made for the Rebbe to move to *Eretz Yisroel*.

On another occasion, when the Rebbe was walking along a road in Vienna, he suddenly stopped, staring at a large conference hall ahead. The Rebbe became transfixed to the spot. Whilst he was standing there deep in thought, tears began to roll down his cheeks. A few years later after the Nazis had marched into Vienna, Hitler *y"ms* (may his name be blotted out) gave his speeches against the *Yidden* from that very same hall.

In 5697 (1937), just before he emigrated, the Rebbe travelled around Europe to bid farewell to his *chassidim*. He exhorted them to follow him saying, "Anyone who has common sense will flee from here as fast as he can."

A big house was bought for the Rebbe on Rechov Bialik in Tel Aviv and in *Shvat* 5697 (1937) the Rebbe and his son-in-law, Reb Yaakov, docked at Haifa. On his arrival, the Rebbe straight away was besieged by the many Ruzhiner *chassidim* living in *Eretz Yisroel*. His house on Rechov Bialik became a center of *Yiddishkeit* and many were helped through his advice. It was well known that when the Rebbe promised someone a salvation, he could be assured that the Rebbe's words would be fulfilled. We will suffice with one such story.

A *yungerman* who was finding it difficult to make ends meet decided to open a grocery store in a new settlement being built between Tel Aviv and Haifa. Before signing the deal, he came to the Rebbe to receive his *berochos*. Whilst he was waiting to be seen, the *gabai* asked the *yungerman* why he had come to see the Rebbe. Upon hearing his story, the *gabai* berated him that he dared to waste the Rebbe's time on such a stupid question, since even a simple person knows that from a few houses in a new settlement he could not

have enough to live on. The *yungerman* agreed to the *gabai's* argument, but, since he was already in the Rebbe's house, he nevertheless thought it would be a pity to leave without asking.

When the *yungerman* entered the Rebbe's room, the Rebbe gave him his *berocho* and told him to go ahead with the deal. The *yungerman*, who by then was quite sure that the Rebbe would advise him against the deal, became confused and told the Rebbe what the *gabai* had advised him. "Who told him what to tell you?" the Rebbe retorted. "He speaks though he does not know what he is saying. Buy the shop and you will be very successful." A few days after he bought the grocery store, the Tel Aviv-Haifa Rail Company decided to make a new stop on the railway next to the store, in order to allow passengers to get off the train and buy a snack. Soon the *yungerman* became very wealthy.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, all the Rebbe's thoughts and actions were given over to helping his fellow *Yidden* in Europe. Although physically far away, the Rebbe knew exactly what was happening all over Europe. Many times people who had been coming to ask the Rebbe to *daven* for their relatives abroad were told not to write the names on the *kvittel* (petition) any more. From this they knew that their relatives had joined the millions of other *kedoshim* (martyrs).

In 1941 *Eretz Yisroel* was in terrible danger. Italy and Egypt were in Nazi hands and the Germans were making preparations to take *Eretz Yisroel*. The invasion could be any day and Rommel *ym's*, the German commander, had already broadcast his intention to destroy the entire country in one afternoon. On the fifteenth of *Tammuz*, the *yahrtzeit* of the Or HaChaim *zt'l*, the Rebbe went to his *kever* (gravesite) to *daven*. The Rebbe stood *davening* with intense concentration, knowing that the situation was critical and only a miracle could save them. Suddenly, to the surprise of all assembled, the Rebbe exclaimed, "The *reshoim* (evil ones) will not come, they will not enter... I have just seen the Divine name of *Hashem* shining brightly, we can be sure they will not enter the Land."

The Rebbe's words spread like wildfire throughout the country, bringing comfort to the panic-stricken nation. When Germany attacked Russia, the Rebbe laughed and said, "This is the beginning of Germany's downfall. This will bring the Nazis' defeat, for the *tumah* (impurity) of Russia is greater than the *tumah* of Germany."

With the arrival of the refugees from war torn Europe the Rebbe did his utmost to help them find places to live and adjust to their new homes. When the **Tshebiner Rov** (who was a Husyatiner *chossid*) arrived, the Rebbe gave him six hundred lira - an enormous sum - to help pay for the cost of a flat. Even this was not enough and the Rebbe summoned six rich *chassidim* and commanded each one of them to give one hundred lira to make up the missing amount.

One of the *chassidim* refused the Rebbe's request and didn't give anything for the cause. A few weeks later, on the first night of *Pesach*, a tearful lady came to the Rebbe crying that her husband had gone mad. Everything was beautifully prepared for the *seder* but when her husband came home from *shul*, a sudden fit of madness descended on him and he threw all the plates and cups on the floor, all the while screaming and shouting. In desperation she ran to the Rebbe to seek his advice. "What did he think?" the Rebbe replied. "**The Tshebiner Rov** will not have his own flat in which to lead his *seder*, and your husband will lead his own *seder*?" The woman promised to bring in the missing money right after *Yom Tov* and with that the Rebbe told her to go home where she would find her husband waiting for her, fully recovered.

It was very seldom that the Rebbe became angry with anyone. Rarely did he try to force or threaten somebody to do something. One such occasion happened with a person who refused to give his wife a *get* despite all the Rebbe's pleas that he have pity on his wife. The Rebbe took out a *mishna Kiddushin* and started to read the first *mishna*, "A woman leaves her husband through a *get* or through the death of her husband." The man suddenly became frightened and called out, "Rebbe I am going to give her a divorce straight away."



Reb Yisroel of Husyat in his later years

Except for these few occasions, the Rebbe never lost his composure. His face glowed with an inner satisfaction, a glow that comes not from the pleasures of this world but from deep down in the soul. The Rebbe would often say, "If it is not as one would want, one must want it as it is." Indeed, just the sight of the Rebbe walking along the streets of Tel Aviv was enough to change the lives of some of those who saw him. Many a secular resident would confess that after having met the Rebbe they were no longer able to lead the same life they had until then. If his everyday stroll was a lesson in *avodas Hashem* (divine service), all the more so were his *tefillos* (prayers). So intense was his concentration that during *davening* he was totally oblivious to everything going on around him. During the War of Independence in 5708 (1948) a bomb fell in the center of Tel Aviv, not far from the Rebbe's *beis hamedrash*. The massive noise and the air raid sirens sent everyone running in a panic to the nearest shelter. At the time of the explosion the Rebbe was in the middle of *Shemone Esrei*. When he finished he turned around to see an almost empty *Beis Hamedrash*, and in astonishment he asked where everyone had disappeared to - he hadn't even heard the noise of the explosion or the siren. Such was his concentration.

A few weeks before the Rebbe was niftar, he was hospitalized. In his last days he asked to be wheeled out into the courtyard, saying that he wanted to see once more the heavens and the earth which Hashem had created and not just the hospital walls, which were made by man. On his last day while he lay unconscious in bed, his lips did not stop *davening* for a second. The whole time he kept repeating over and over again the same *posuk*: '*malchuscho malchus kol olamim*' (his Kingship is the Kingship of the whole world), and with these words he was *niftar*. On the same day he was buried in Teveria where his *kever* is a *mokom tefillah* (prayersite) until today.

His place was succeeded by his son-in-law **Reb Yaakov zt'l**, whom the Rebbe had appointed, promising that all the *berochos* (blessings) he gave would be as if the Rebbe himself had given them. After Reb Yaakov's *petirah* in *Cheshvan* 5717 (1957) he was succeeded by his son, Reb Yitzchok, who led and guided the *chassidim* until his *petirah* in *Ellul* 5728 (1968).

My Town - Skalat

written by Hadassah Katz

It is my powerful desire in this article to resurrect alley of my youth and to mourn the cradle of my childhood in my father's home. From here I derive my great strength. Home - which will never leave my heart. Time has the capacity to heal, but never to uproot that which is deep in my soul. As time passes, the horrors of that time will only deepen and they will guide our attempts at rest.

I would like to describe things which characterized the life of our town. Skalat was not only a town of Jews. It had a large Christian population, which limited our activities and made our lives harder. We the Jewish youth, grew up among this mixed and hostile population.

First our adolescence, in the activities of the Zionist youth movements. We rebelled against the accepted and the routine. We rebelled against our parents, who did not encourage the Zionist notions. Our ally was the Hebrew School, which showed the way for the young people who so much wished to go to Eretz Israel. We learned the Hebrew language and its literature.

In the Zionist youth centers, which our parents forbade us to visit, we wove our secret dreams of Zionist fulfillment. Our very assembly expressed our rejection of the public school, where we felt exactly who we were and how unwanted we were by the Christian community. That was the beginning of the great tragedy, which we did not sufficiently comprehend. Among the millions annihilated were the Jews of Skalat.

Another experience which I recall across the expanse of time, a great experience for all the Jews of Skalat - the visit of the Rebbe. Every year, before the Shavuoth holiday, the Rebbe of Husiatyn would visit our town. The city rejoiced as this was a ray of light in our overcast, everyday existence. A deep happiness mingled with our gray struggle for survival. Every heart yearned for the Rebbe's blessing, his encouragement, his advice.

We felt close to the expression of Hassidic exuberance. We drew it into our daily activities on behalf of the new ideologies which filled us, the ideals of aliyah and fulfillment.

From here, to the Zionist youth of our city. Zionist activity was expressed in the funds - the Keren Kayyemet Fund, the Keren HaYesod Fund - and the idea of Zionist fulfillment in Eretz Israel. All the Zionist parties - "Betar," General Zionists," "Mizrachi," "Hitahdut" - took part in these activities, each in its own way. They had a common goal - building Eretz Israel.

In "Hitahdut" - of which the pioneering organization "Gordonia" was a part - I myself was active and I dedicated my best energies to its programs. Many of the youth of Skalat found in "Gordonia" both interest and content. Youth came to "Gordonia" from all levels of the community. We found a "listening ear." Many of the youth who had endured hardship as children, found the youth programs to be a sort of compensation and a source of joy in creation.

It was clear to us that without deepening our awareness of "the movement," we would not succeed in fulfilling our ideas. We organized summer camps and meetings, to which we would escape every chance we had. It took much courage to fulfill our program. The community did not always understand our spirit and our desires. Jewish youth from petit-bourgeois homes, preparing themselves for a life of agriculture in Eretz Israel - this was a revolution which our parents could never understand.

We organized a preparatory farm in the Skalat area. And we went further afield for our training. We fought and succeeded. We passed this tradition to our children who guard the freedom of our land even today.

Let these words be a memorial candle to my parents, my brothers, my sisters, and to all the Jews of Skalat who walked the road of torture and sorrow, depressed and downtrodden.

I remember with greatest disgust those who in a rush to save their own lives, sent their dear ones to their deaths and collaborated the Nazi murderers in their evil works.

I will not forget my father's house, my mother's Sabbath candles and her teary face as she poured out her bitter heart in prayer and supplication.

The Husiatyn Hassidim in Skalat

written by Tonka Pikholtz

Despite the small size of our town, there were many Hassidim, divided according to their various “courts:” Husiatyn, Chortakov, Vishnitz and others. The most well-known of the Hassidic leaders (known as “admorim”) in our town was the Rebbe of Husiatyn, who had many followers among the Jews of Skalat.

My father was a follower of the Rebbe of Husiatyn and for that reason I was left with many memories and impressions of the Hassidic atmosphere of those days.

A wealthy Skalat Jew, Yoseph Milgrom, the owner of a flour mill and a great admirer of the Rebbe of Husiatyn, hosted the Rebbe in his home. Milgrom lived in a large house at the edge of town. The house was bordered by a garden with rich earth, which created a natural slope. At the edge of the garden, Milgrom built a wooden cabin - a “schlass.” Past the schlass was a pasture with a flowing stream.

The Schlass was divided into two sections. The Rebbe of Husiatyn prayed in the smaller section, generally sitting in solitude.

The second section was the central hall, resembling a synagogue. Tables and benches were arranged along the walls. A section along one wall was elevated, to allow the Hassidim to was the Rebbe's face as he prayed.

The Rebbe would arrive in Skalat towards the Shavouth holiday and remained six to eight weeks. He lived in Vienna and his visits to Skalat were apparently connected to his visits to the grave of his father, in Husiatyn. His visits to the town were a special occasion for all the local Jews. Everyone came out to welcome him. A select group of Hassidim went in carriages to meet escort him into town. In front of the house where the Rebbe would be staying, the Hassidim lined up in two rows and welcomed the Rebbe with the traditional “shalom aleichem.” The Rebbe's glance alone would excite the crowd, who believed him to be holy.

During this period, Hassidim came from all over Poland, particularly Galicia, to Skalat. Hotels, inns, even private homes were insufficient for the visitors, and the city came to life. In the courtyard of the schlass, crowds sang and danced, particularly on the Sabbaths and the holiday.

The Rebbe was considered holy and was treated like a king. The Rebbe excelled in his knowledge of medicine and of law. The simple Jew saw him as a source of advice, particularly in times of trouble. The Rebbe would also refer the ill to the most notable doctors of the day. Occasionally, Poles would turn to the Rebbe for advice, as well.

The Rebbe's stay brought a temporary prosperity to the town and many a family looked forward to that aspect of his visit. Paying boarders often made significant contributions to the families' budgets. I recall that Hassidim from Rzeszow and Krakow stayed in our home. They stay up until late at night, occupied with weighty matters of belief and religious practice, and with stories of the Rebbe's greatness. The meeting between the ordinary Hassid and his Rebbe was one of the great events in the life of a believer.

The Rebbe of Husiatyn made aliyah and lived to age ninety-two. He is buried in the Old Cemetery in Tiberias.

A Brief History of the Jewish Community in Gusyatin, Ukraine

Written by George Aronson, Sharon, Massachusetts

Grandson of Leona Guttmann Sachs, b. Gusyatin, 1903,

Great grandson of Osias Guttmann, b. Gusyatin, 1860, and Tillie Bucharest, b. Satanov (ca 1870)

The history of the Jewish community in Gusyatin spans more than 500 years from its early origins as a farm in the sixteenth century. The community reached its peak in the late 1800s, when Gusyatin was both a thriving commercial center and one of the most important Hassidic centers in Galicia. Sadly, the golden age did not last for long. Gusyatin was heavily damaged during World War I, then destroyed during World War II.

Jews were among the first to settle in Gusyatin after its incorporation as a town in 1559. There are records of a synagogue in Gusyatin by the start of the seventeenth century. The community was small and vulnerable, however, and suffered from anti-semitic activity. In 1623, three Jewish farmers, brothers, were accused of murdering Christian children; they were prosecuted, tortured and burnt at the stake. Cossacks conquered the town in 1648, although not much is known of the fate of the town's Jews at that time.

The Jewish community revived and began to prosper from 1680 through 1699, when Turkey conquered and ruled Galicia. By the end of the seventeenth century, the Jewish community had built a beautiful new synagogue. The building of the new synagogue was challenged in court by Bishop Sharkovski of Kamenetz-Podolski, who claimed that the synagogue should not have been built without his approval. In 1729, the local nobility, the Pototzki family, intervened to dismiss the court suit in order to protect the Jews that lived on their land. The Jewish community grew modestly under Polish rule in the first half of the eighteenth century, reaching 1,208 by 1765.

In 1772, Gusyatin was divided into two sections when Poland was partitioned between Austria and Russia. Most of the Jewish community lived in developed areas west of the Zabrotz River, ruled by Austria, although some Jews lived in the smaller portion of the town east of the river, ruled by Russia. As a border town, Gusyatin became an important path for trade between Austria and Russia, and merchants came from surrounding areas to trade in fairs in the town. At this time, most of the Jews in Gusyatin were craftsmen or wholesale merchants. Many sold or shipped grain and lumber to Russia.

In the 1800s, Hassidim began to move to Gusyatin, including followers of Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav. The Hassidic population growth sharply after Rabbi Mordecai Shraga-Bar, son of Rabbi Israel of Rozhin, established a Hassidic Court in Gusyatin in 1861. Hundreds of Hassidim moved to Gusyatin to be near the rebbe, fueling the rise of a local hospitality industry. Rabbi Mordecai befriended the local nobility, the Marquis Golokhovski, and the whole area prospered. An elegant study house was built for the rebbe on the grounds of a partially ruined castle. New synagogues were built, as were ritual baths, hospitals and old age homes. The town supported new industries, including a Jewish-owned factory to make fountain pen nibs, print shops and paper merchants, as well as doctors, lawyers and other professionals. The town was hurt by a major cholera epidemic in 1870, but growth resumed with the opening of the railroad connection to Stanislavov in 1882 and the influx of refugees from Russia at that time.

The turn of the century was the golden age for Gusyatin, with Jews comprising 4197 of the town's 6060 residents in 1890. Hassidism thrived. Zionist groups were started, including Bnai Zion and a Theodore Herzl group. A Toynbee-Hala club was established to present popular lectures on Saturday evenings. An organization called Dorshei Sefat Yeshanim was founded to republish rare manuscripts. Modern services came to the town, including banks, electricity and a new sewage system.

The town's growth was haunted by the prospects of war between Austria and Russia. The flow of refugees increased, especially in 1903-1906. Crossing the border became more difficult. Fearing the war, Gussyatin residents also began to emigrate. By 1914, the Hassidic Rebbe of that time, Rabbi Israel, moved to Vienna and closed the Hassidic Court, putting an end to the golden age.

On August 9, 1914, the Russian Army crossed the Zabrotz River and attacked Austria through Gussyatin. Fires in the town destroyed more than 600 buildings. The Jews dispersed among neighboring towns and villages to avoid the oncoming armies. Many died from typhus as local conditions deteriorated. Jews were ordered out of Gussyatin in on June 13, 1915, but many made their way back into the town. When the Russian Army retreated in 1916, the remaining Jews were ordered into exile again, this time to the Kiev district of Russia. Raids from peasant gangs plagued the few Jews that returned to the town after the war in 1918 to 1919. Then the Bolsheviks came to power and confiscated property from Jewish-owned businesses. By 1921, the Jewish population had declined to 368, less than 10 percent of the peak population in 1890.

The Jewish community of Gussyatin never recovered from World War I. The town continued to be divided by an international border, this time between Poland and Russia. All commerce with Russia was stopped by travel restrictions. The Hassidim center was closed. The electric lighting system was not repaired. Yet, some Jewish life continued despite the decline. A rabbi was hired (Rabbi Jacob Ringel). A Hebrew school continued to operate. The ritual bath was repaired. Gussyatin was the home of several active Zionist groups, including Hitachdut (Labor Party), Mizrachi, and Revisionists. And although contact between the Polish and Russian portions of the community was prohibited, each Rosh Hashanah, the Jews of Polish Gussyatin and Russian Husiatyn would go to the banks of the Zabrotz River for the Tashlich prayer, the only time during the year when they were allowed to see and speak with each other.

On July 6, 1941, Gussyatin was conquered by the German Army. Immediately, the local Ukrainians began to attack the local Jews. The community was burdened by forced labor and confiscation of property. Many died of hunger and disease. Finally, in March 1942, the remaining Jews of Gussyatin were rounded up by the Nazis and deported by train to Kofichintza and Provozna, never to return. So ended 500 years of Jewish life in Gussyatin.

Source: The main source of material for this history is Pinkas Hakehillot, the Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities in Poland, Volume II, Eastern Galicia, pages 181 to 184, published by Yad Vashem in 1980. Home sources and internet information was also consulted. Thanks also to Eldad Ganin, who assisted in translation.

From Yitzhak Buxbaum's Jewish Spirit Journal, on **D'vekut Meditation**:

Rabbi Mordechai Shraga of Husyatin (in the Rizhiner dynasty) spent most of the day in total d'vekut (meditative God-consciousness) with his Creator. He would sit still without moving for hours on end, his face a ghostly white, his eyes turned upwards, so that just the white of his eyes was visible. Sometimes the gabbaim (aides) became frightened, for it appeared as if he had passed away; they would bang on the table until they finally aroused him from his deep d'vekut.